

**Summary of San Rafael General Plan 2040 Steering Committee Meeting
Meeting #12 March 13, 2019
6:00 – 9:00 PM at 750 Lindaro Avenue**

Attendance

Members Present: *DJ Allison, Jenny Broering, Maribeth Bushey, Bill Carney, Berenice Davidson, Richard Hall, Eric Holm, Linda Jackson, Margaret Johnston, Jeff Jones, Bonnie Marmor, Stephanie Plante, Kate Powers, Jeff Rhoads, Jackie Schmidt, Roger Smith, Sparkie Spaeth, Eric Spielman*

Members Excused: *Bella Bromberg, Omar Carrera, Drew Norton, Karen Strolia, Cecilia Zamora*

Absences: *Bob Miller*

Alternates Seated: *Sara Matson (for Omar Carrera), Jack McGinn (for Bella Bromberg), Samantha Sargent (for Cecilia Zamora)*

Alternates in audience: *Judy Schriebman*

Staff Present: *Raffi Boloyan, Anne Derrick, Allison Giffin, Paul Jensen, Barry Miller*

Consultants: *Stefan Pellegrini, Mitali Ganguly, Xenia Alygizou (Opticos Design), Dave Javid*

Sign-Ins: *Shirl Buss, Pam Reaves*

1/2 Welcome/ Roll Call

Chair Plante called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM. Project Manager (PM) Miller took roll call and reviewed the agenda.

3. Acceptance of Meeting Summary

A motion and second (Jackson/Allison) were made to approve the Minutes from the 2.13.19 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comment on items Not on Agenda

Pam Reaves requested that the Committee stay aware of the consequences of the decisions they are making through General Plan 2040. She referred to the notion of “maxing buildings out” to create larger footprints--these large buildings could have negative impacts on neighbors as they may result in noise, shade, and increases in traffic.

5A. Downtown Visioning Workshop

PM Miller introduced the Downtown Precise Plan Visioning and Issues item. He introduced Opticos Design and Stefan Pelligrini, Principal. Stefan introduced other members of his team.

Stefan explained that during this item, he would be asking the Committee for ideas about the future of Downtown. He requested that initially, the responses to his questions would be written by the Committee Members on index cards that were provided.

1) How would you describe Downtown San Rafael in one word? (a positive quality)

Members turned in their index cards. Stefan asked for a few members to share their responses. These included:

Historic, Eclectic, Walkable, Authentic

2) What will Downtown San Rafael be like in 25 years? (in one word)

Members turned in their index cards. Stefan asked for a few members to share their responses. These included:

Non-drivable, Art, Multi-cultural, Vibrant, Community, Beautiful

3) Stefan asked the group to take the word from the previous question and make a sentence out of it. He asked that a few members share their ideas. Responses were:

- Indistinct, anonymous bland architecture devoid of charm or character due to big box development both commercial and residential
- Vibrant and lively hub where individuals and families from diverse backgrounds live, work and enjoy cultural activities and greenspace
- Downtown San Rafael integrates water restoration and sea level rise, walkable pathways, services and various neighborhoods into an evolving community
- Local place where you can shop, eat, and bring your family
- Downtown San Rafael is a walkable, sustainable place that practices and exemplifies the alignment of human and natural communities towards the restoration of a stable climate

Stefan asked the group about Downtown San Rafael's strengths. Responses were:

- The Mission (it's our anchor)
- Convenience -can walk everywhere
- Great place for new businesses
- The ambiance – a place to look forward to being in, the streetscapes
- A fun place to live with active events, good restaurants, good shops to buy things
- Diverse both socially and economically
- I like the scale of the City – you can get from one place to another in a short period of time
- The Arts on 2nd Fridays/ space for arts events
- Downtown is close to a lot of neighborhoods, like Bret Harte and Gerstle Park

A committee member expressed concern about the process and the excessive use of buzz words and trendy ideas, without addressing the challenges of the City

More responses:

- The historic significance (a traditional center with a lot of history)

- I like its perseverance and its potential for the future
- The Arts and the Rafael Theater
- Accessible (easy place to walk and some places to sit) and good place for people with disabilities or who are older
- The City is built at a human scale and you can walk around from one neighborhood to another with a lot of resources
- I like the pedestrian scale (both horizontally and vertically) and amenities. A nice place to walk and an easy walk to transit or sit in a Café and meet people.
- I like the view of the beautiful hillsides
- The retail spaces like Copperfield books, Rafael Theater—I wish there was greater density
- I think San Rafael has great bones and has an exceptional Main Street and is architecturally diverse with B street being a secondary Main Street. The unbroken street wall makes it exceptional. It's a real place.
- I like the kinds of businesses (not so corporate) in Downtown.

Stefan asked the group about things that are problematic, limiting or negative in Downtown San Rafael;

Responses include:

- It is not place I want to go to – there is nothing to draw me there – lack of good restaurants and shoe stores, etc. Also, parking is terrible and the cost to park is too high.
- The homeless in the doorways and the vacant storefronts can make it feel unsafe
- It's "scruffy." The burden of the County's homeless problem has fallen disproportionately on downtown San Rafael.
- It is difficult to drive around—I dread the traffic when I go there
- Keep the one-way streets
- It is not a super exciting city and has a lack of attractions
- There is a lack of people to support the shopping and a lack of housing to support the people
- A lot of the business patrons are older—as a result, the City is dead at night and is not attracting younger people
- Traffic is very bad especially during rush hour
- The timing of the Smart train lights makes people wait a long time. Can take 10 minutes just to get out of the driveway.
- We are a "chokepoint" for traffic coming to and from many places (SF to North Bay, North Bay to East Bay)
- There is a disconnect in the logic expressed by Committee members. Traffic is terrible, so why are we advocating for more housing. Everyone drives, and more housing will mean more traffic—not less. People are not going to give up their cars.
- We need more housing—there is a regional shortage
- It is depressing and the empty storefronts make it uninteresting
- There is a lot of business turnover, but no form of communication to let residents know what's happening—need better communication. Need a Map directory of businesses, like in a Mall.
- There are too many cars going too fast and too little housing that is affordable
- The City needs greater density and transit oriented development and a way to bike downtown safely—we need more people downtown
- The City lacks a civic space – we do not really have a town square - and bikes do not have a safe way to get downtown. It would be good to elevate SMART to alleviate its impact on traffic

- Lack of civic space and lack of space for people to gather. Needs better pedestrian infrastructure so I can feel safe walking with my kids.
- Follow the Boulder (CO) model, with four story scale in the center and parking on the edges, with a great public space in the middle
- Negatives include traffic and a lack of attractions. Farmers Market is an asset.

Stefan asked about opportunities. If you had the opportunity to change things in the downtown, what would that look like?

Responses included:

- An east/west bike connection to go through downtown—bike lanes on 4th Street from Miracle Mile to High School.
- The 101/ SMART east/west convergence provides the setting for a very accessible place, if we apply the right design solution. Increase mobility and access through the area. Continue the north-south greenway through the area.
- There is a potential opportunity on the east side of 101, since the blocks with the supermarkets (including Montecito Plaza) are underbuilt. Can we create a new urban neighborhood in this area, oriented toward transit and the shoreline?
- There is an opportunity to reimagine the public realm (waterway, parks, transportation) and prioritize its improvement
- The core opportunity is housing. Bring in more diversity and build on that influx of energy with the connection to transit center for pedestrians.
- Fourth Street is like a speedway—it should be rethought to be pedestrian friendly. Add incubator offices and places for local start-ups—there is a lot of room to create good urban design and improve character.
- The bus transit center and Whistlestop is a good opportunity site for housing and other things
- A new look downtown would be good – with a pedestrian precinct. Live music and new uses will attract younger people.
- Pop up events would be good downtown –restaurants, etc.
- Get beyond the buzz words like vibrant and walkable. Look at things objectively rather than sticking to dogma. Switch to objective measures like return on investment. Don't count on SMART as it will not attract that many riders.
- Don't create so many obstacles. Recognize economics.
- There's an opportunity that revolves around the transit center relocation -- more open space and public art. Balance the adverse effect of high density with these other positive things.
- The built environment suffers from obsolescence—we don't have people living over mom and pop shops like the old days. Perhaps some retail could be replaced with residential. We need to move the homeless services off B Street and restore the historic buildings as an economic asset.
- Make public space more attractive. No negatives—just need more positives.
- Parking lots create a “snaggletooth” appearance. Perhaps new uses above structured parking.
- Phase out cars. Perhaps provide more transit up and down Fourth Street.
- Downtown needs more of an identity—civic space. I like the town square idea where people of all ages can hang and gather.
- I like the town square ideas and more breweries!
- Parking lots in and near Downtown should be looked at. Perhaps rethink how they are located and what other modes of transportation are possible. Maybe no parking on 4th.

- Look at shared mobility—go-bikes, bikeshare at the transit center
- Who will patronize Downtown when the current generation ages out?
- Form-based code is an opportunity to realize some of this potential
- Phase out the liquidambar trees due to tripping hazards

Stefan described the upcoming charette process. He urged committee members to participate and invite their friends, neighbors, and networks. Questions (*and staff responses in italics*) are noted below:

- How will the consultants would be using the large volume of information that already exists on Downtown from charettes and Visions over the years. Also, be sure and fully engage the business community. *PM Miller responded that all of the existing information (the 1993 Downtown Vision, the 2012 Station Area Plan, etc.) has been provided to Opticos. He stated that what we are trying to do is update the market and economic data, land use data, traffic data, etc—and revisit some of the past ideas in light of current conditions. We are going to build on the foundation we already have.*
- Will the Wildfire protection plan and other disaster-related plans be considered when determining the density of downtown, so as to not put more people in harm’s way? *Yes, this is a factor in determining where growth may occur.*
- Public engagement should focus on asking residents and businesses what the problems are—not necessarily what the solutions should be.
- If we build housing, this means we will add cars. Measurable, fact-based objectives must be clearly stated. Need to use the right metrics.
- Consider other documents, like the Station Area Plan and the Canal Design Study.
- What will the end product of this process be? *Stefan responded that the final outcome is the Downtown Precise Plan, which will establish policies for private development and public space, including streets, infrastructure, parks, etc. The Plan will identify opportunities and capacity on properties where development may happen and the relevant standards and zoning regulations.*

Community Development Director Jensen noted that our approach will incorporate the work that was done previously. He remarked that as part of the charette, an area in the room could include a summary of past plans (i.e. the Downtown Vision, the Station Area Plan, the Parking and Wayfinding Study, the Good Design Guidelines that were formulated last year, etc.).

Stefan presented a “word cloud” that highlighted the words the Committee wrote about Downtown San Rafael:

Diverse and vibrant were the most frequently mentioned features. Positive words included walkable, lively, eclectic, historic, authentic, beautiful, sustainable. Negative words included boring, congested, indistinct, diverse, ruined, non-drivable.

5 B. Strategy and Schedule for Developing and Review Policies

PM Miller handed out a diagram showing the process for reviewing and developing policies. He also reviewed the schedule for 2019. Questions/ comments are noted below, *with staff responses in italics*.

- Can the policy matrices be provided in Word rather than as PDF so committee members can edit? *Yes*
- When is the Charette? *We are tentatively looking at May 8-11, but that can't be confirmed until we know we have a space*
- Will the public be able to participate in the design process? *Yes, that is the intent.*
- We need a way to reach regular people in our outreach, and not only hear from activists who do not represent the majority of residents. *It is the duty of Steering Committee members to represent their constituents and get the word out about the charrette. Staff will be reaching out via Nextdoor, flyers, emails, and the website to attract a wide range of people. This will also happen through pop-up workshops to be done as part of the General Plan.*
- How are we doing outreach to the schools? *The City is working with the school districts and we have our student representative on the Steering Committee.*
- Since school finals are in June, the first week of May would be an ideal time to reach out to students as part of the charrette.

5C, D, and E. Policy Discussion on Air and Water Quality, Noise, and Arts/Culture Policies

PM Miller noted that the Committee would take Agenda Items 5 C, D, and E together---first by viewing a PowerPoint and “voting” with electronic clickers on each topic area, and then by going back through each topic for a deeper dive and discussion of the policies. He delivered a presentation that included the following polling questions.

He asked the first polling question: What are your overall thoughts about the Air and Water Quality Element?

Member responses were:

Selection	#Members
No Changes to suggest	6
Have a few suggestions	6
Have major issues with content	4
Not sure / need more information	5

PM Miller described the Noise Element. He then posed Polling Question 2: What are your overall thoughts about the Noise Element?

The results were:

Selection	#Members
No specific changes to suggest	4
I have a few questions and/or ideas to share	9
Have major issues with content	1
Not sure/need more information	7

PM Miller posed Polling Question 3: Which of these noise sources concerns you the most (pick up to 3)?

Selection	#Members
Construction (jackhammers, piledrivers, compressors, etc.)	12
Freeways	11
Domestic (lawn equipment, barking dogs, music, parties, etc.)	11
Cars, Trucks, Motorcycles and local streets	10
SMART Train	5
Business and Industrial operations	2
Aircraft	2
Quarry Activities	1
Helicopters	0

PM Miller introduced the Culture and Arts Element. He posed Polling Question 4: What are your overall thoughts about the Arts and Culture Element?

Selection	#Members
I have no specific changes to suggest	12
I have a few questions and/or ideas to share	6
I have major issues with the content and a lot say about this	1
Not sure/need more information to weigh in	2

PM Miller posed Polling Question 5:

If the Arts and Culture Element is expanded, what additional topics should be covered? (pick up to three)

Selection	#Members
Activating public space (concerts, etc.)	12
Adding color to the urban environment (murals, painted streets, “tactical urbanism, etc.)	10
Creating a City Arts Commission	8
Creating a more supportive environment for artist	8
None. The Element not be expanded	3
Creating one or more Arts Districts	3
Not sure/need more info	3
More arts education	2
Increasing the number of arts venues	2
Arts funding through CIP, fees or incentives	2

Air and Water Quality Policy Discussion

After completing the PowerPoint and polling, the Committee returned to the first topic. The following comments were made about the air and water quality policies:

- There should be strong lobbying to not let current “dirty” technologies drive our community. We need to lobby with the State and beyond to get gasoline out of cars and plastics out of the environment, etc.
- We should treat greenhouse gas emissions as a pollutant

- Look at fact-based analysis when it comes to air quality. Don't build high density along freeways when it will result in exposure of residents to particulates and CO.
- A 500' setback along the freeway is sufficient. We don't need a 1000' setback, because we do not have diesel emissions and high truck volumes or industry.
- As a layperson, I don't have enough information to comment objectively, but the City should not blindly follow Air Quality District guidelines. How much discretion does the City have, and how much is mandated? *Staff indicated that they could differentiate which policies/ actions were mandated by state or federal law and which were discretionary.*
- Is it really necessary for the City to "strive to exceed" standards, rather than simply meeting them?
- The transition to electric cars may make the issue of building along the freeways moot—there will be much lower emissions in the future
- Look at the data—trucks are the big problem. The transition to electric vehicles is going to happen more slowly than we think, and diesel trucks will be around for awhile, so we should still be cautious about putting housing near freeways due to health concerns.
- Pollution (particulates) and noise from the Quarry should be acknowledged and addressed
- Lobby SMART to use electric trains
- When placing air quality policies in the General Plan, they should be in the Safety Element (not the Conservation Element). Also, we should recognize the impacts of climate change, including intense heat and smoke from wildfires. We need to create buildings that are safe, including offices, retail, as well as housing.

Noise Policy Discussion

The Committee considered the Noise policy audit. The following questions/ comments were made.

- Does the City have the authority to regulate Caltrans regarding noise? *Staff replied that Caltrans had to consider local policies in their planning.*
- Proceed with caution (prohibiting housing in noisy areas), so as not to drive up the cost of housing even further—there are architectural design approaches to mitigate noise.
- It will be hard to balance our goal having an "alive after 5" Downtown with having quiet neighborhoods

Arts and Culture Policy Discussion

The Committee considered the Arts and Culture policy audit. The following questions/ comments were made.

- Our policies should support public/private partnerships, for instance with Dominican. There are good opportunities for collaboration.

- It's odd that the 2020 Plan called Falkirk the city's "cultural hub" as it is hard to get to and not centrally located. Maybe we should develop a hub elsewhere?
- Can we be more aspirational? As the cultural hub of Marin, we should have a world class museum.
- Please report on what comes out of the focus group on arts and culture planned for later this year
- I support a percent for arts program. This would be a good time to apply it to new development—how it's crafted is really important. It should be expansive and cover a wide range of arts projects (such as including performance space in new development).
- The library discussion in the 2020 Plan is outdated. Consider electronic books, downloadable books, etc.
- Do we need to address libraries in the General Plan if there is a separate library plan underway? Is this redundant? *Staff replied that because the General Plan covers all topics, libraries should be included—even if just to cross-reference the other plan and provide a framework for it.*
- City should support "pop up libraries"—the existing ones have worked well
- Innovation and experimentation in the library system should be encouraged
- The City should be very careful investing in new Arts projects as they could be a waste of money and may fail. Avoid "folly projects" like the theater in Novato.
- The Marin History Museum just received a bunch of donated paintings from a couple who lived on Mt Tam and they don't know what to do with them. Coordinate with entities like that and help them with fund raising. City should have a role in trying to find partners in the Art world.
- Collaboration should be encouraged. Look at UC Davis/ Shrem Museum example (Davis).
- City should be strong and proactive on the Arts as it is one of the things that makes San Rafael unique. It shapes our identity.
- Re-create the Cultural Arts Commission
- Tap into the indigenous culture and the first inhabitants of our community
- Expose youth to arts and culture, especially in disadvantaged communities. Coordinate with the schools.
- The Pickleweed Board has explored collaborations with groups like the Canal Welcome Center, Youth in Arts, the Chamber, and Dominican.
- Look at the Spanish literacy program—and the free tickets provided to take kids to the Marin Center for cultural events
- Encourage homegrown, local art

PM Miller told the group that he will be sending the three policy audits in MS Word. He requested comments back by April 1. He also asked members to suggest who should be invited to a focus group on the arts.

6. Committee Alternate Comments

Alternate Judy Schriebman thanked the Committee for their work and expressed that she hoped Terra Linda would be given the same detailed consideration as Downtown in the General Plan Update.

7. General Business

- A. Next meeting - Chair Plante remarked that the next meeting is April 10.
- B. Staff Announcements - PM Miller remarked that the City has been awarded a grant from TAM to update the Canal Community Based Transportation Plan.

Planning Manager Boloyan commented that on May 20, the City Council will discuss the new state requirements for monitoring traffic (shift from Level of Service to Vehicle Miles Traveled).

- C. Committee Announcements – Age Friendly San Rafael is doing a survey; older adults should respond.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS – There were no public comments

Adjournment – the meeting was adjourned at 9.05 PM